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A SERMON.

PREACHED IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH,

HALIFAX,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

THE REV^D. WILLIAM COGSWELL, A.M.

CURATE OF SAID PARISH,

ON SUNDAY, 13TH JUNE, 1847.

BY REV. ROBERT WILLIS, D.D.

RECTOR,

AND ARCHDEACON OF NOVA SCOTIA.

GOSSIP & COADE, PRINTERS, HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA.

1847.

ANGLO-SCOTCH CHURCH OF HALIFAX

1871

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[The following Sermon was written in great haste, in the midst of many interruptions, and at a time when the Author was suffering from indisposition. After the repeated solicitations of many persons, to whose views and feelings deference is due, he has, not without reluctance, consented to its publication; and it is hoped that the circumstances under which it was written, will soften the edge of criticism, while the desire to do justice to the memory of a departed Brother, will atone for any inaccuracies in the hasty production of one who has no ambition to appear before the Public as an Author.]

PROVERBS X. 7.

"The memory of the Just is blessed."

WHEN we contemplate some striking instance of a friend or neighbour passing from this to another world—from his earthly habitation into the abodes of eternity,—we are naturally led as Christians into a train of thought which carries us at once beyond the regions of the grave. There have probably been times in the history of most men, and doubtless there have been seasons in the past lives of almost every one here present, when the momentous importance of religion, and the dread realities of eternity, have been impressed upon their minds with awful and awakening solemnity. It is our duty to pause occasionally by the way, in our journey through life, and look back upon such seasons. Certain relations too, have subsisted between us and others who have stood connected with us by the ties of blood or of official station, the remembrance of which may be profitable to our souls. To encourage such reflections—to dwell upon the past, the relations which we have sustained, and the part which we have acted in it, is doubtless a most wholesome exercise.

More especially should we cherish the remembrance of that relation which has subsisted between us and those who have spoken to us the Word of Life; who have shared with us in our joys, and wept with us in our sorrows; who as our Pastors have watched for souls as those who must give an account; or as fellow labourers in the Lord's vineyard have been united with us in the Ministry of the Gospel.

How tender is the tie which binds together husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister! How deep the sorrow, and heart-rending the affliction, when this cord is snapt asunder! Not less interesting perhaps, and certainly not less momentous in its consequences, is the relation which exists between a clergyman and his flock,—a relation of the deepest, because of eternal moment to each party. This is a connection which should be frequently called to mind, and the responsibilities which it involves seriously pondered on; otherwise it must be brought to our remembrance hereafter, with shame and confusion of face.

It has been very justly remarked, that—"It is generally the lot of good men to be proportionably more regretted when they are dead, than they were valued when they were living. When they are once taken away from us, and removed for ever from the scenes of this life, we are apt to call ourselves to an account for not having paid to them that degree of respect and attention which their great talents or good qualities now appear to have merited at our hands. Their excellencies seem to increase in number and measure, and their failings pass out of remembrance. This pleasing recollection of departed worth prevails in all rightly constituted and well disposed minds."*

"The memory of the Just is blessed."

The word "just" is of extensive signification. It admits of being taken in two senses, as Commentators would instruct us. *First*, "just" in the proper sense of the word; *Secondly*, "righteous" in a more extensive yet in a limited sense. For in the absolute sense there is no righteous man on the face of the whole earth. "After we have done all that is commanded us to do, still we are unprofitable servants." All are "included under sin." And "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our works or deservings." *Art. II.* What the Law of Moses could not do for us, the Gospel has effected. "The Law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made us free from the Law of sin." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us."—Gal. iii. 12. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."—2 Cor. v. 19. And the leading object

and earnest desire of the sincere and faithful Christian,—of him who believes this doctrine—is to set God always before him, convinced that He is always at hand to succour and defend those who put their trust in Him, not relying on their own strength, but on the strength of Him whose “grace is sufficient for them.” Man in his best state is an “unprofitable servant.” No one can say what our blessed Saviour was able to say, “Father I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” Every Christian knows and confesses with St. Paul—“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

These few observations, and the emblems of mourning* which are seen around us, will sufficiently indicate to you the channel into which your thoughts may at this time, as I conceive, be profitably directed, and readily remind you of the recent death of one, who for many years was my fellow labourer in this Parish—a spiritual pastor and master in this Congregation, and in that capacity bound to you, as well as to myself, by the most interesting and important of all human ties.

Connected with this mournful event are many circumstances which it may be useful and profitable to bring to your remembrance, and which will suggest reflections fraught with the best instruction to all you of this Congregation, who were the dearest objects of his pastoral care and regard, and whose spiritual and eternal welfare he sought to promote with the most untiring zeal and diligence and earnest prayer.

My own feelings and my own weaknesses are such, that I confess myself totally unable to do justice to the memory and the worth of my departed friend and fellow-labourer. Moreover, to a deep consciousness of my own inability for the task, is added a constitutional unfitness, and a natural reluctance to approach such affecting subjects. I freely admit, however, that such mournful occurrences as the present are full of instruction and carry with them no unmeaning lesson of admonition for our own preparation for the last sad summons. Nay, it is our bounden duty for the good of

* The Church was hung with mourning.

others, to bring forward on these occasions, such circumstances as may render the memory of the just blessed to us. We must be at the same time careful to confine ourselves within our proper sphere, to submit religiously to the Divine dispensation, and profess our belief and confidence that in all such things the Judge of the whole earth does right. He is a righteous Judge, and therefore we will not presumptuously attempt, as it is sometimes done, to ascribe bliss, or certain degrees of bliss in heaven to our departed friend, however strong our wishes may be, or whatever ground we have of hope.

He of whom we now speak was indeed a most devoted servant of his heavenly Father; and his heart's desire and unceasing object seemed to be, that he might not only be a good Christian himself, but also, and more especially, that he might prove himself a faithful Minister of Jesus Christ. And we have good hope, that through the merits of his Redeemer and the mercy of his God, he may be a partaker of the benefits of the sacrifice of that Saviour, in whose merits alone he put his own trust, and taught others to put their trust also in the same Rock of salvation.

The Revelation of the Gospel by Jesus Christ, must always be considered an act of the pure goodness and unmerited favour of the Almighty to His sinful creatures. The glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, are made known in His written Word, in which are contained also His gracious encouragements and precious promises: and all so plain that he who runs may read them. But frail man, prone continually to evil, is too apt to neglect the concerns of eternity, and to pay a divided attention to "the one thing needful."

In compassion to the wants and frailties and lost state of man, and for his continual instruction and edification, God has been pleased to appoint and establish in His Church a standing Ministry. He has appointed a succession of Ministers whose peculiar office it is to preside over the spiritual concerns of the people committed to their charge,—to assist and guide them in these high matters, "not as having dominion over their faith, but as being helpers of their joy,"—to unfold the great truths of the Gospel, to put them continually in remembrance of the things which belong unto their peace, and to exhort and stir them up to a suitable and holy

conversation—to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and to a greater diligence in making their calling and election sure, "looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith."

My Brethren, he who has lately been removed from us, and whose loss is so generally lamented, was once himself one such spiritual guide and teacher in this Parish.

How interesting was that charge to many who now hear me! How he performed the duties of his Ministry I feel it quite unnecessary for me to dwell on in detail. You know all I can say: you know as much as I can testify of him. His eloquent and fervid language—his forcible admonitions and instructions—his constant appeals to the Word of God on subjects of faith and duty—were regularly heard from this pulpit whenever he was able to enter it. His faithfulness and zeal have been surpassed by none. Naturally of a slender frame and weak constitution, he carried these proofs of his devotedness to the cause of his Divine Master beyond his strength. In doing the work of an Evangelist and giving proof of his ministry, he thought he never could do enough, but laboured we may truly say, as St. Paul said of himself, more abundantly than any of us. Few have lived and died more beloved, and more sincerely regretted by all who knew him.

My Brethren, I know how you feel on this occasion. I know my own feelings, and I hope I am not insensible to the importance of his valuable services, as a beloved brother in Christ, and a fellow labourer in this part of our Lord's vineyard. Possessed of talents of no ordinary kind, he consecrated those talents to the service of his Maker,—he conscientiously devoted himself and the powers which God had given him, to promote the cause nearest to his heart; the cause of his Divine Master—to win souls to Christ. Often, very often, can I testify from my own knowledge, did he exercise his ministry and preach the Gospel, when he was suffering from pain and great weakness of body. Such was the zeal, and such the character of him whose loss we all so much and so sincerely lament.

I have not been able from indisposition during the last three days, to say all that was in my heart to say. The few observations which I have made were necessarily thrown together in a hurried and imperfect state. To fill up this

imperfect sketch of the character of our departed friend, I will only add, and I am sure you will readily subscribe the declaration,—*that his sole aim and unceasing desire was to preach the Gospel—to preach Christ crucified, the only hope and refuge of sinners.* And this is all he would have wished to be said of him on this occasion. His memory will be long cherished and revered in this Parish.—

“ The memory of the Just is blessed.”

Before I conclude, I would beg to make a few observations on the words of our text, which may not be inapplicable to the present occasion, or unprofitable to yourselves if duly meditated on, and received in the spirit in which they are offered.

“ The memory of the Just is blessed.”

Every office which is performed in this Church will serve to bring to your remembrance him who once ministered to you in spiritual things. *At the Fount of this Church* many of your children, some perhaps of yourselves, have by his ministration in Baptism been admitted Members of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, received the waters of regeneration and the mark of Christ on your foreheads by his hand, he at the same time praying that you might receive also the fulness of God's grace, and ever remain in the number of His faithful and elect children, and lead the remainder of your lives according to that beginning: and, devoutly on his knees, he thanked God that it had pleased Him “ to regenerate you by His Holy Spirit, to “ receive you for His own children by adoption, and to incorporate you into His Holy Church.” *At this Altar* he administered to you the consecrated elements of the body and blood of Christ, and on the proper occasion bidding you come to that table, exhorting you to receive that Holy Sacrament to your comfort, in remembrance of what your Saviour did and suffered for you, and in compliance with His dying command, “ do this in remembrance of Me”: encouraging and calling upon you to do every thing to the glory of God and in the name of the Lord Jesus.

From *this very Pulpit* how often has he unfolded to you the gracious terms of salvation, and importuned you to accept them and come unto Him, who is “ the way, the truth and the life.” *In the Parish* his calls to the bed of

sickness and to the performance of other acts of his Ministerial office were numerous and oppressive ; a call to the humblest of the flock was never rejected. And I well remember, when, in the year 1834, it pleased the Almighty to visit us with pestilence, (the Asiatic Cholera,) our labours then being both arduous and dangerous, how readily and fearlessly he attended every call to the sick and dying. In the care he had for the souls of those within his pastoral charge, we hope and trust he watched as one who had to give an account : and frequent were the occasions on which he might have complained of fatigue and bodily pain.

He has now gone to his account ! And remember, my brethren, that if it is required in a spiritual steward and dispenser of God's Word, that a man be found faithful—that he must render an account of his stewardship,—an account will equally be required of you, as to the manner in which you have received his instructions, and the Word of God from his lips. Have these things been remembered by you, and have they been remembered to your benefit ?

The St. Paul's District Visiting Society owed its existence in a great measure to him. This Association, which is strictly parochial, has been the means of affording much relief, during the winter months, to the poor of this Parish ; and his interest in its welfare was never abated.

There is one very important point, of which to omit all mention here, would be unjust to his memory. I allude to his labours in the cause of the Diocesan Church Society of Nova Scotia, as its able Secretary. The ability which he here displayed, and the labours which he so cheerfully bestowed in promoting the good work, are worthy of all commendation. As evidence of this, we have only to examine the Reports themselves, which were drawn up by him from the formation of the Society to the year 1845-6, when he was compelled by sickness to resign the office of Secretary. On several occasions he received the unanimous and sincere thanks of the Bishop and Clergy of the Diocese, for his unremitting attention to the concerns of the Society ; for the able manner in which he executed the office of Secretary ; and for his labours generally in promoting the interests of this valuable Institution.

It is unquestionably the duty of every member of the Church to manifest a willing disposition to hear and obey the instructions of their Minister ; and to receive the words from

his lips, not as his, but the Word of God, and himself as God's minister, for their spiritual edification. The Ministerial office is of Divine appointment, and to reject it is to reject not man but God. You remember what the Saviour says on this point,—“He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me.” This is a subject, my brethren, which should occupy your thoughts and engage your best attention: and it surely will be profitable to you, if only you rightly consider and apply it. If, as we have already noticed, they who watch for your souls have to give an account of their ministry—of their diligence and faithfulness in their office,—will not an account be equally demanded from you? And ought not every one of the congregation, while the day is theirs, to take heed unto themselves how they hear,—to “suffer the word of exhortation,” that they may “hear meekly the Word of God, receive it with pure affection, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.”

And now with respect to the engagements which you entered into in the Sacrament of Baptism. Your Baptismal covenant is often brought to your notice in this sacred place; and we hope you frequently make it the subject of deep meditation, and of prayer, that you may be able through God's grace to keep it.

Do you then often take up this as a separate and distinct subject, and consider well the full meaning and deep responsibility of this solemn engagement?

Many of you, my young friends, were prepared for the sacred rite of Confirmation by your late Pastor; and under his guidance and instruction took upon yourselves the solemn engagements made for you in Baptism.

Do you now bear in mind that you solemnly and publicly, before the Bishop and Congregation, pledged yourselves to renounce the devil, the world and the flesh, to believe the doctrines of the Gospel, all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and to keep God's holy will and commandments to the end of your lives? Ask then yourselves, each of you, this question, and you cannot ask yourselves a more important question—for your own sakes ask it—and in remembrance of him by whose ministrations you were brought into this state of salvation, ask it,—*Have I kept my Baptismal vow?* Have I been strenuously fighting under the banner of Christ against the enemies of my salvation? Have I been endeavouring,

through God's grace, to renounce the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil? All this you engaged to do, and if you are not seeking and praying that you may be enabled in the strength of Christ to do so, you can lay no claim to having performed your part of the Christian covenant.

Some of you were perhaps first bidden, and for the first time received, from your late Minister, the consecrated memorials of Christ's death and sacrifice for sin. Do you then continue in this godly and christian practice, to the strengthening and refreshing of your souls? You cannot neglect to do this without a plain violation of a Divinely ordained Rite, and the express command of your Redeemer; and if you neglect it, how can ye be prepared to give in your account.

It is not sufficient that we barely confess these truths with our lips. The devils believe and tremble! But we must labour to exemplify them in our lives. "Prove all things." "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith." "Quit you like men, be strong."

All these are points of great interest to every reflecting Christian. When you look back upon the past, the time when and the circumstances under which you received perhaps your first religious impressions—when you remember by whose instrumentality you were reclaimed from your wanderings and guided into the paths of peace—when you consider your connection with him, with the Church and her ordinances,—the interest is increased, and the remembrance sanctified to your spiritual comfort and progress in godliness. Hear what St. Paul says,—“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

“The memory of the Just is blessed.”

The relation between a Minister and his Flock is at once most sacred and awful, as being not only of present, but of eternal interest to both: both must give an account. Be it then your part, my brethren, to look back upon the past portions of your lives, and consider well what has been your conversation. Pray that your sins and negligences and ignorances and omissions of duty may be forgiven, through the merits of your Redeemer, on true repentance.

And Finally—if these things are interesting and momentous

to you, they cannot be less so to us. If woe is denounced on those who hear not the Word of Salvation, woe is also denounced on us if we preach not the Gospel. Ministers are men, and what is committed to them is held in earthen vessels. We know and feel deeply our many infirmities and weaknesses—our own unworthiness; and what is more than all momentous, we know and feel the high responsibilities of our office, that we have to render an account of our stewardship at the last great day.

Let me bespeak all your kindness, your forbearance, your charity, and above all your prayers, that we may be more and more deeply impressed with the awfulness of our charge: and that God would give us grace and wisdom and strength and courage faithfully to fulfil its duties.

Let us then, my brethren, work together here in love, that when we die we may die in peace, meet again hereafter in peace, and be enabled to give up our respective accounts with joy and not with grief. Join we then in earnest prayer to God, that He who giveth eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, may preserve us, and keep us from falling or failing in our Christian course;—that He who ordaineth strength of praise even out of the mouths of babes, may enlighten us with His heavenly wisdom, encourage us by His strength, and sanctify us for His service, by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit.

And may God, of His infinite mercy send down upon you, my beloved Flock, abundantly the dew of His heavenly blessing—the comfort and assistance of the Holy Spirit to prevent you in all your doings, and lead you into all truth—the truth as it is in Jesus. And may He enable you by the same heavenly guidance, “to have a right judgment in all things,” and to walk in the steps of your blessed Saviour, that when He shall appear ye also may appear with Him in glory!—Amen.

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